

Conversation on e-readers in the classroom:

Interviewer: Hi Chris, thanks for talking to me today about e-books in the classroom. I'd love to hear what you think about it!

Chris: Like any instructional tool, the teacher has to decide what their learning goal is. If they decide an e-book would work for them, I'd say there are many advantages to using them in a K-12 classroom.

Interviewer: That sounds interesting. Tell me more.

Chris: Well, there are obvious strengths, such as the portability of an e-reader, their long battery life, and the fact that they can hold more than 4,000 books. You can throw it in your bookbag or purse rather than having to load up with all the books you are reading. I also like that an e-reader (iPad for example) can be connected to a Smart Board and projected for a whole class exercise. Students would be able to talk about the text while highlighting and annotating for everyone to see. Pretty cool function.

Interviewer: That sounds great.

Chris: Yes, it is. I also like the built-in functions of an e-reader that help readers who are struggling. The built-in dictionary is fantastic! All you do is highlight a word and the definition pops up. Keeps the reading process streamlined and focused. I also like the text-to-speech function for lower-level readers. With a pair of earbuds, each student can be read to individually while they follow along with the text. This can be very helpful for reluctant readers that get hung up on pronunciations or words they don't know. That happened to me when I tried to read Harry Potter!

Interviewer: That sounds great, too. But is it really that easy?

Chris: No, it's not easy. It's a process, like anything else. It takes time to find books, build lessons, and implement. And it also takes time to teach readers how to navigate the device. Sometimes the interface is not super intuitive. An example of this is highlighting text to comment. E-readers can be clunky and hard to use; sometimes it's definitely easier to do it the old way, with a pen and paper. This isn't a deal breaker though, it can be overcome with a little practice.

Interviewer: What other problems might there be with e-readers in class?

Chris: There are several factors to think about. Financially, it's becoming more feasible. An e-reader costs about \$100 per unit, and you can have kids share them to make the investment stretch. However, with e-reader software crossing platforms, this is becoming less of an issue.

For example, I can read my Kindle content on my phone, my Kindle, my Mac, my PC, my Chromebook, and my Android tablet. Many schools already have these devices in place, so that makes it easier and more feasible to think about implementing ebooks. They would just have to focus on spending money on the books themselves, rather than the devices already.

Interviewer: Do you think teachers would use ebooks, even if they didn't have to worry about the costs associated?

Chris: Providing teachers with access to technology is no guarantee they will use it. (Zipke, p 3) Sometimes technology can be intimidating to learn how to use, and even more, to learn to use as an instructional tool. Personally, technology invigorates me! I love to learn how to use new devices, and figure out how to implement classroom use. But all teachers are different, and some have the attitude of why fix it if it ain't broke?

Interviewer: Well, that is something to think about, isn't it?

Chris: Sure it is. But studies show that students are highly attracted to electronics and would be more likely to read on a device they consider a cool toy. If that's the case, I say go for it! Anything to get kids reading. (Zipke, p 4)

It's also never a bad idea to expose students to every type of learning possible. Technology changes so quickly, and any experience they have with technology will help them adapt in the future.

Interviewer: What other positives are associated with e-readers?

Chris: If all the students have the same device, it puts them all on an equal level. No one can distinguish between high-level and low-level readers unless they look on the screen to see what they are reading. I really love this aspect, it creates a level field for the students.

Interviewer: That's definitely a bonus. No one wants to be known as the low kid.

To wrap this up, do you think e-readers are going to replace paper books?

Chris: Honestly, no. I think right now people like both. There are positives and negatives associated with books and e-readers. But I do think there are fantastic applications of both in the classroom. It comes down to good planning and teaching. But I also think students are attracted to digital tools; it's what they know.

Strengths

- Portable
- Hold 4,000+ titles - ease of use and transporting materials is awesome, unlimited access to books
- Long battery life
- May motivate reluctant readers; built-in dictionary, read aloud/text-to-speech capabilities
- Adjust font size - good for those with visual impairments
- There are many titles available for free
- Some can connect to Smart Board which helps whole class instruction
- Equality-readers all have the same device and you don't know who is reading what unless you look/ask.
- Multiple accounts on 1 device
- Access the same e-book across platforms, location
- students are powerfully attracted to electronics and would therefore be much more likely to read on what they perceive to be a cool toy (Zipke, p 4)

Weaknesses

- DRM
- Internet connection/electricity
- Touch and smell of a "real" book; writing in it and bending corners down
- Financial commitment from school/district \$100 per
- Some books don't translate/convert well to electronic format, i.e. maps, special formatting
- providing teachers with access to technology is no guarantee they will use it (Zipke, p3)
- learning to operate the device and advanced features - non-intuitive functions "But my pen remains mightier than your silicon." (Catalano)
- finding, purchasing, downloading books can be time consuming for teachers
- distractions on devices with other internet/gaming capabilities, the Facebook Factor
- readers perceived digital content as less permanent. Remember when Amazon changed/deleted content without user's permission? (Catalano)

General Info:

- e-books are books that are put in an electronic format that can be read using a device, like a computer, a smart phone, or an e-reader device like Kindle or Nook
- The purchase of e-book readers seems to have peaked in 2011
- teachers need to be comfortable enough with the technology to take the lead and follow best practice recommendations for teaching literacy (Zipke, p 7)

- Can you be completely submersed in an e-book?
- Higher Ed: In the HP survey, 57% preferred print; only 21% preferred an eTextbook (Catalano)
- humans seem to read differently when given the same text on a screen instead of on a page – and are distracted more easily – so less of what we read sticks. (Catalano)
- The near-term future won't be paper-or, but paper-and, pixel. Until the two are indistinguishable in terms of features, factors and feel. (Catalano)

Resources:

Catalano, F. (2015, January 18). *Paper is back: Why 'real' books are on the rebound*. GeekWire. Retrieved September 20, 2015, from <http://www.geekwire.com/2015/paper-back-real-books-rebound/>

Sasson, R. (n.d.). The Benefits and Advantages of eBooks. Retrieved September 20, 2015, from http://www.successconsciousness.com/ebooks_benefits.htm

Zipke, M. (2012). Teachers' thoughts on e-readers in the elementary school classroom. Retrieved September 20, 2015, from http://digitalcommons.providence.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1001&context=education_fac